

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

2012 Accomplishment Plan

November 4, 2010

Program Title: The RIM-WRP Partnership (W-01)

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Funds Recommended: \$13,000,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x): *(to be completed when signed by Governor)*

Abstract

The RIM-WRP Partnership will protect and restore 9,657 acres of previously drained wetlands and adjacent native grasslands on 77 conservation easements. It will leverage \$20.8 million in federal WRP funds.

Program Narrative

The Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve–Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Partnership will accelerate the restoration and protection of approximately 9,657 acres of previously drained wetlands and associated upland native grassland wildlife habitat complexes via permanent conservation easements. The goal of the RIM-WRP Partnership is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, while optimizing wildlife habitat on every acre enrolled in the partnership. The RIM-WRP partnership enables Minnesota to leverage \$1.6 of federal WRP funding for every state dollar available through RIM Reserve. An appropriation of \$13 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will leverage \$20.8 million in WRP funds to Minnesota.

We expect to enroll approximately 77 permanent conservation easements totaling 9,657 acres of wetland grassland wildlife habitat complexes. This will enable the RIM-WRP partnership to restore approximately 385 previously drained wetland basins totaling 3,219 wetland acres, and adjacent native grassland prairies on approximately 6,438 acres. These restored wetlands and native grassland complexes will provide critical

habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife species in Minnesota. Wetlands and adjacent grasslands provide habitat for waterfowl, pheasants, deer and non-game species, some that are threatened or endangered.

Design and Scope of Work

Minnesota's original wetland and prairie landscapes have been lost at an alarming rate over the last century and a half of European settlement. Minnesota's prairies once comprised nearly 20 million acres, extending from the borders of Iowa and Wisconsin in the southeast to North Dakota and Manitoba in the northwest. Less than 1% of this native prairie remains. Minnesota has lost an estimated 42 percent of its original 16 million acres of wetlands to drainage or fill activities. The loss of wetlands is most severe in the prairie regions of the state. Approximately 90% of prairie wetlands have disappeared and in the southwestern part of the state losses are as high as 99%.

Prairie wetlands are particularly important for migratory waterfowl. Although the North American pothole region contains only about 10% of the waterfowl nesting habitat on the continent (including a significant portion of Minnesota), it produces 70% of all North American waterfowl. This extensive loss of Minnesota's prairie and wetland habitat has led to the decline of many wildlife and plant species originally abundant in the state. Of the nearly 1,200 known wildlife species in Minnesota, 292 species, or approximately one-fourth, are at risk because they are rare; their populations are declining or they face serious risks of decline due to loss of habitat.

The RIM-WRP Partnership, the premier private lands wetland restoration program in the nation, is a local-state-federal partnership delivered locally by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). In addition, this partnership is possible through collaboration among many local, state and federal partners including Ducks Unlimited (DU), the Minnesota Waterfowl Association (MWA), Pheasants Forever (PF), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) and the United States Department of Interior - Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).

The RIM-WRP Partnership uses the NRCS State Technical Committee's established subcommittee for WRP to provide statewide guidance for WRP in Minnesota. In addition, the RIM Reserve Management Planning Committee – a subcommittee of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources – provides oversight and guidance on behalf of the BWSR.

The RIM-WRP Partnership holds one to two joint meetings per year to provide program oversight and guidance and to establish payment rates for upcoming sign-ups. Specifically, the RIM-WRP Partnership has had the USFWS Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET), located in Fergus Falls, develop a GIS *Wildlife Habitat Potential Model* for use with the WRP and RIM Reserve programs' environmental evaluation. In addition, the RIM-WRP Partnership has developed the *Minnesota Wetland Restoration Evaluation Worksheet* (attached) which is used to evaluate each

easement application on its potential to restore wetland functions and values along with optimum wildlife habitat benefits.

We will conduct a RIM-WRP partnership statewide sign-up in late 2010 or early 2011, or select from previously submitted high-scoring applications which were not funded. All applications will be scored and ranked using the *Minnesota Wetland Restoration Evaluation Worksheet*. The worksheet determines which projects will provide the greatest wetland functions and values and optimizes wildlife habitat on the selected and enrolled acres. The highest scoring applications will be selected for funding with Outdoor Heritage funds.

Planning

Several recent statewide Minnesota planning efforts have called attention to the dramatic loss of wetlands and native prairie grasslands over the last century and a half. Minnesota has lost over 99% of its original native prairie and over 90% of its prairie wetlands. The following is a list of strategic plans considered in development of RIM-WRP leveraging proposal that will permanently restore and protect wetland and native grassland complexes in strategically targeted areas of Minnesota.

The *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* calls for protecting priority land (habitat recommendation #1) and this proposal is working to protect and restore priority grassland and wetland habitats important to waterfowl, grassland and wetland birds as well as the myriad species that call grasslands and wetlands home. This proposal will also implement the following habitat recommendations within the plan:

- Protect priority land habitats – the RIM-WRP Partnership contains priority grassland and wetland habitats important to waterfowl, grassland and wetland birds as well as the myriad species that call grasslands and wetlands home.
- Protect critical shore lands of rivers and lakes – there are RIM-WRP easements being acquired that will protect shoreline of shallow lakes contained within this proposal.
- Restore and protect shallow lakes – there are RIM-WRP easements being acquired that will include protection of shallow lakes contained within this proposal.
- Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds – the RIM-WRP Partnership protects and restores wetlands and grasslands. A majority of the lands acquired will be prior-converted for agricultural purposes.
- Keep water on the landscape – by protecting and restoring wetlands and grasslands, the RIM-WRP Partnership will return water to the landscape (permanent wetland restoration) and help keep water on the landscape (permanent native vegetation restoration).

Minnesota DNR Long-range Duck Recovery Plan has priority goals for long-term protection and restoration for wetland and grassland habitat for duck production.

The RIM-WRP Partnership will contribute 9,657 acres to the 2,000,000 acre goal set under the plan. Specifically, it will permanently protect and/or restore 3,219 acres of wetlands towards the 600,000 acre wetland goal and permanently protect and/or restore 6,438 acres of native grasslands towards the 1,400,000 acre grassland goal.

Minnesota DNR Long-Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in Minnesota has priority goals to protect and restore nesting and winter habitat for pheasants. The RIM-WRP Partnership contributes approximately 4,000 acres to the plan goal of restoring 1,560,000 acres of habitat within the pheasant range of Minnesota.

The RIM-WRP partnership contributes to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan by contributing 9,657 acres of breeding habitat (wetlands and grasslands) to the 11.8 million acre goal to restore continental waterfowl populations. Most of the work will occur within the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, which is recognized as a national priority for wetland and grassland habitat and breeding waterfowl and grassland bird species.

Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare – An Action Plan for Minnesota's Wildlife, is Minnesota's comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. It identifies the species-habitat relationships that show wetlands and grasslands are two of the habitats used by the most species in greatest conservation need. These are the habitats that have experienced some of the greatest loss and degradation in Minnesota.

The L-SOHC has identified five ecological sections in Minnesota to guide expenditures from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) over the next 25 years. In addition, the L-SOHC has established an ecological section vision and priorities for each of the five sections.

Although the RIM-WRP Partnership is a statewide program, it gives priority to that portion of Minnesota that has had the greatest loss of wetlands and prairies and subsequently significant declines in many species of wildlife that are wetland complex dependent. Specifically, the RIM-WRP Partnership will protect and restore wetland and native grassland complexes by converting agricultural lands to wetland upland complexes in the Forest/Prairie Transition, Prairie and Metro Urbanizing L-SOHC Sections.

The RIM-WRP Partnership will protect and restore wetlands and adjacent native grasslands and accomplish the following priority actions.

Prairie Section Vision – Approximately 80% of the RIM-WRP Partnership's activity is in the L-SOHC Prairie Section. By acquiring permanent conservation easements the partnership is able to meet the following L-SOHC priorities:

1. Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes.
2. Convert agricultural land to wetland/upland to protect, enhance, or restore existing habitat complexes, such as existing WMA's.
3. Protect, restore and enhance shallow lakes.
4. Protect expiring Conservations Reserve Program (CRP) lands.
5. Protect, enhance and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success.

Forest Prairie Transition Section Vision – Approximately 15% of the partnership's activity occurs in this section. Acquisition of permanent wetland restoration easements in this area provides us the opportunity to restore and protect wetland/grassland complexes migratory habitat for waterfowl species so as to increase migratory and breeding success.

Metro Urbanizing Section Vision – The partnership works primarily in that portion of the Metro section that is located in the prairie pothole area of Minnesota.

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

There is no direct relationship to other constitutional funds at this time. Indirectly, the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership with BWSR, DNR, PF, and SWCDs pays for SWCDs to hire technicians to promote conservation provisions of the Federal Farm Bill and other conservation programs to private landowners. The Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund provided \$1.0 million in funding via an LCCMR recommendation beginning July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2011.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

The RIM Reserve program was established in state statute in 1986 to restore and set aside marginal land principally for increasing fish and wildlife populations. Past funding via bonding varies, ranging from \$0 in most "off-year" bonding bills to a one-time maximum of \$52 million for the Minnesota River CREP in 2001. BWSR last received bond funds in 2008.

The RIM-WRP Partnership received Outdoor Heritage Funds in 2009 (\$9.058 million) and 2010 (\$6.895 million). Both of these OHF appropriations are being used to protect and restore previously drained wetlands and adjacent native grasslands through permanent conservation easements. The RIM Reserve program is not funded by general revenue and is not part of BWSR's agency base budget. All aspects of the program are funded by project funds the agency requests and receives to accomplish program objectives.

Sustainability and Maintenance

Once a RIM-WRP easement is acquired, NRCS is responsible for maintenance, inspection and monitoring during the life of the 30-year WRP easement. The State of Minnesota assumes sole responsibility via its perpetual RIM Reserve easement once

the 30-year WRP easement has expired. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and NRCS and partners' staff document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date completed
Conduct sign-up, ranking and selection of easements	200+ easement applications received, reviewed, ranked and approved for funding.	Winter 2010/Spring 2011
Acquire Easements	77 permanent conservation easements recorded.	2012-2014
Wetlands/native grasslands restored	9,657 acres are permanently protected and restored.	2012-2014

Attachments (on spreadsheet workbook – 3 separate tabs):

- A. Budget
- B. Proposed Outcome Tables
- C. Parcel List

No Map is needed for the accomplishment plan

Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet

Name of Proposal:	The RIM-WRP Partnership
Date:	1-Oct-10
Legal Citation / Proposal Number:	W-01

[Link Here to definitions of the budget items below.](#)

Total Amount of Request \$ 13,000,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

Personnel

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash		Total
				Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	
<i>Engineer</i>	1	3	\$ 387,700			\$ 387,700
<i>Engineering Tech</i>	1	3	\$ 259,600			\$ 259,600
<i>Engineering Tech</i>	0.6	3	\$ 155,760			\$ 155,760
<i>Program Mgmt</i>	0.1	3	\$ 38,250			\$ 38,250
<i>Easement Processor</i>	1	3	\$ 193,600			\$ 193,600
<i>Admin/IT/Database</i>	0.1	3	\$ 28,800			\$ 28,800
<i>position 7</i>						\$ -
Total	3.8		\$ 1,063,710	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,063,710

Budget and Cash Leverage *(All your LSOHC Request Funds must be direct to and necessary for program outcomes.)*

Please describe how you intend to spend the requested funds.

Budget Item	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash		Total
		Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	
Personnel - auto entered from above	\$ 1,063,710	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,063,710
Contracts	\$ 423,500			\$ 423,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 6 & 7)				\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 6 & 7)				\$ -
Easement Acquisition	\$ 11,276,500	\$ 20,800,000	<i>federal WRP funds</i>	\$ 32,076,500
Easement Stewardship	\$ 111,100			\$ 111,100
Travel (in-state)	\$ 66,190			\$ 66,190
Professional Services				\$ -
DNR Land Acquisition Costs				\$ -
Other				\$ 59,000
Capital Equipment (<i>auto entered from below</i>)	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -
Other Equipment/Tools	\$ 23,000			\$ 23,000
Supplies/Materials	\$ 36,000			\$ 36,000
	\$ 13,000,000	\$ 20,800,000	\$ -	\$ 33,800,000

Capital Equipment *(single items over \$10,000 - auto entered into table above)*

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
<i>Item 1 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 2 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 3 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 4 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 5 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 6 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 7 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 8 enter here</i>		
Total	0	0

Attachment B. Outcome Tables

Name of Proposal:	The RIM-WRP
Date:	1-Oct-10
Legal Citation / Proposal Number:	W-01

Table 1 and Table 3 column totals should be the same AND Table 2 and Table 4 column totals should be the same

If your project has lakes or shoreline miles instead of land acres, convert miles to acres for Tables 1 and 3 using the following conversion:

Lakeshore = 6 acres per lakeshore mile / Stream & River Shore = 12 acres per linear mile, if both sides

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Describe the scope of the project in acres (use conversion above if needed)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					0
Protect	3219	6438			9657
Enhance					0
Total	3219	6438	0	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

9657

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

9657

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect	\$ 4,745,000	\$ 8,255,000			\$ 13,000,000
Enhance					\$ -
Total	\$ 4,745,000	\$ 8,255,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 13,000,000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 13,000,000

Check to make sure this amount is the same

as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						0
Protect	483	1448		7726		9657
Enhance						0
Total	483	1448	0	7726	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

9657

These three cells should be the same figure.

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

9657

Total Acres from Table 1.

9657

Attachment C. Parcel List

Name of Proposal: The RIM-WRP Partnership
Date: 1-Oct-10
Legal Citation / Proposal Number: W-01

County	Township	Range	Direction	Section	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity R=Restore P=Protect E=Enhance	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
Parcel Name											
<i>Individual parcel information will not be available until after the sign-up Statewide</i>									P		